



The Story of the Brackley Morris Men

A Traditional Northamptonshire Morris Side

12. The Musician - 'Every note has its step'

The traditional instrument for playing morris music was for many centuries the pipe and tabor. In 1955 Fred Hamer wrote: *"E A (Archie) Kendall has often given me advice about music for the Morris. The pipe he says is the best instrument, not only for dancing, but for attracting spectators, because it has carrying power and plays a pure tune, ie without the obscuring complications of chords. All the Brackley men I have met have insisted on a steady beat of around 101 = 100. And hold that no morris dancer ought to be in too big a hurry to enjoy it, for every single note has its step"* Fred Hamer. (14)

Keith Chandler described how *"The dancers kept time to the music of a pipe and drum, which until the final decade of the last century (ie 1890s) was played by a single musician. The three holed pipe was played with the left hand and a drum suspended from the same, and beaten with a stick held in the right. Latterly separate men played each instrument and by 1884 two musicians played six-holed whistles and a third beat a side drum"* (4)



William Makepiece and James Watts. Keith Chandler says of the musician: *"Of all the members of the dance set, it is he who is indispensable...The Brackley Morris dancers appear to have been fortunate inasmuch as for much of the second half of the nineteenth century they were able to procure the services of two pipe and tabor players, William Makepiece and James Watts. But around 1880 or so... Makepiece died, while Watts moved away to live in Wardington"*. (4).

Joseph Woods of Deddington. *William Makepiece... died around 1882 and then the Brackley Men got another pipe and taborist. This was the renowned musician Joseph Woods of Deddington.* (4).

In correspondence between Thomas Curtis and D'Arcy Ferris (12), we hear that Woods could command a good fee for his services: *"Woods of Deddington is about a 6/- a day man but there is a man at Wellington that is a Brackley piper – about 2/- or 2/6 would pay him"*. But it appears that the cost was not a constraint as *"they make a lot of money when they go out"*.

The list of dance tunes in Woods' repertoire is quoted by Hilderic Friend in one of his articles in the Banbury Guardian (7) and is reproduced by Chandler in his E,D&S article of 1981. (4). Chandler says that *"comparing these with the tunes collected by Sharpe (16) and Hamer (15) gives an indication of the dances being adapted to tunes which the piper knew"*. (4)

Archie Kendal and Charles Blackwell. Following Woods, the piper E Archie Kendall and his uncle Charles Blackwell, a fiddle player, were musicians for the Brackley team.



Bucknell Morris Men in 1875. Probably the oldest morris photo. Jim Powell, playing the pipe and tabor, must have been one of the last players in the country.



Above left is a photo of the Bucknell Men from 1875, useful here as it shows a contemporary team with its musician.

The photo in the centre is part of a larger photo dated 1913 showing the Brackley and Whitfield Men. Seated at the front are the three musicians: Archie Kendall (whistle), Arthur Blencowe (drum) and W Blackwell (whistle). The full photo appears in chapter 5 of our history.

On the right we see former musician Archie Kendall (right) in conversation with Tony Edwards, Squire of the Oxford University Morris Men, during the Brackley Septcentenary celebrations of 1960. The full photo appears in chapter 6 of our history.



The Magdalen College Boys side of the 1960s. Under the leadership and tuition of Roger Nicholls, pictured below right (c 2010), some of the boys learned to play the piano accordion, which remained the instrument of choice right through to the establishment of the adult side in the 1970s.



Speech Day, Magdalen College School, 1960



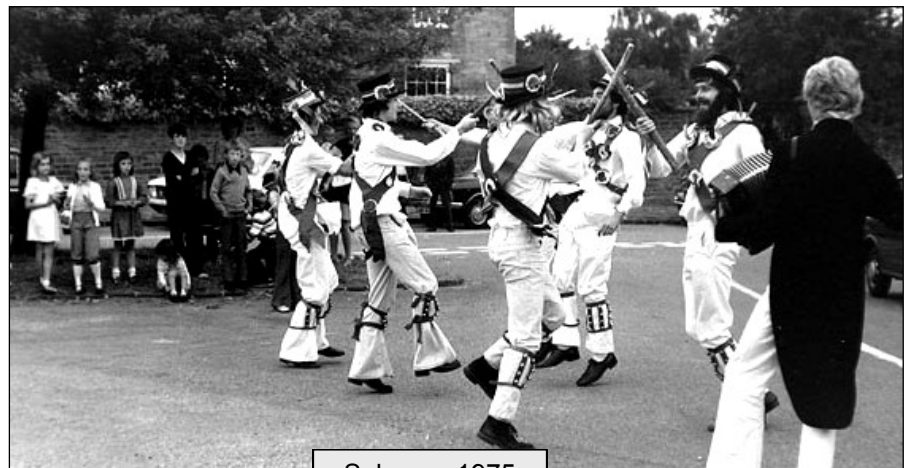
1972/3



Roger Nicholls



Towcester 1977



Sulgrave 1975

During the 1980s & '90s, the side began to attract new musicians with other instruments including melodeon, fiddle, pipe & tabor, concertina, flute and mandolin.



Gateridge Farm, August 2014



Kingsthorpe 25th August 1984

The current musicians

The photos on the following two pages show the current musicians as they appear from 2012 to 2014



Liz & Richard York, 2012



Stephen Ferneyhough, Weston 2013



Richard York, Aug 2013,
recording for the BMM
CD '*Skill & Tenacity*'



Philip Hughes, Richard York, and Derek Martin,
Gateridge Farm, Aug 2014



Everdon Fete 2013



John Weaver, Brackley
Morris man since 1963



Philip Martindale,
Boxing Day 2013



Roger Nicholls with piano accordion during the recording of the
BMM CD 'Skill & Tenacity' at Canons Ashby in August 2013



The Musical line up, Everdon Fete, August 2012



Stephen Ferneyhough,
Brackley, 2012



Mark Perkins,
York, Sept 2013



Stephen Ferneyhough, Philip Martindale,
and Mark Perkins, York, Sept 2013